

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 8255

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PK CH
SUBJ: ASGHAR RETURNS FROM PRC: OUT TO CAPTURE THE LEFT?

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 7730 (B) ISLAMABAD 8034

1. SUMMARY: RETIRED AIR MARSHAL ASGHAR KHAN RETURNED AUGUST 22 FROM A TWO WEEK VISIT TO THE PRC. HIS STATEMENTS ON THE GREAT PROGRESS HE SAW IN CHINA AND THE RELEVANCE OF THE CHINESE MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT TO PAKISTAN MAY PRESAGE A RENEWED ATTEMPT BY ASGHAR TO CARVE OUT A POSITION ON THE PROGRESSIVE LEFT IN
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PAKISTAN. END SUMMARY.

2. RETIRED AIR MARSHAL ASGHAR KHAN, PRESIDENT OF THE TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL PARTY, RETURNED AUGUST 22 FROM A TWO WEEK VISIT TO THE PRC (REFTEL A). AT A RAWALPINDI PRESS CONFERENCE, ASGHAR GAVE THE PRC HIGH PRAISE IN ALL AREAS. ASGHAR STRESSED THE RELEVANCE OF CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT MODEL TO PAKISTAN, NOTING THAT

CHINA HAD "PUT INTO EFFECT THE CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY PREACHED BY ISLAM," WHILE PAKISTANIS STILL JUST TALKED ABOUT CREATING AN ISLAMIC SYSTEM. ASGHAR WAS ALSO IMPRESSED WITH THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND THE MOBILIZATION OF SOCIETY THROUGH "SELF-RELIANCE AND COLLECTIVE EFFORTS."

3. ASGHAR OBSERVED THAT PAKISTAN SUFFERED FROM THREE MAJOR PROBLEMS;

--A THREE PERCENT POPULATION GROWTH RATE (AS OPPOSED, HE SAID, TO A ONE PERCENT GROWTH IN CHINA);

--LOW PRODUCTIVITY;

--"ROTTEN ADMINISTRATION AND OPPRESSIVE POLICE."

HE SAID THAT IN CHINA HE HAD SEEN POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THESE PROBLEMS, AND PROMISED THAT FEATURES OF THE CHINESE MODEL WOULD BE REFLECTED IN THE "DYNAMIC, PRACTICAL, AND PROGRESSIVE MANIFESTO" THAT THE TEHRIK PLANS TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT ELECTION.

4. COMMENT: ASGHAR'S SOJOURN TO CHINA IS PART OF A STRATEGY TO CARVE OUT A POSITION ON THE PROGRESSIVE LEFT IN PAKISTAN. ASGHAR IS ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN ATTRACTING THE PROGRESSIVE FACTION OF THE PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY (PPP) WHICH, WITH BHUTTO AND HIS
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FAMILY CONTAINED BY THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION, IS AT A LOSS FOR LEADERSHIP. THE TEHRIK CHIEF'S VISIT TO CHINA, AND HIS SUBSEQUENT COMMENTS, MAY ALSO REFLECT AN EFFORT TO IMITATE THE EARLY PPP WHICH, UNDER BHUTTO'S TUTELAGE, PUT GREAT STRESS ON THE CHINESE MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT; ON ATTACKS ON THE ADMINISTRATION; AND ON THE PARTY'S "PROGRESSIVE" SOLUTIONS TO THE PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS.

5. WITH THE SCHEDULED AUGUST 23 FORMATION OF A NEW CABINET GOVERNMENT WHICH INCLUDES POLITICIANS FROM THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA), ASGHAR'S INITIAL GOAL MAY BE TO LINE UP THE "OPPOSITION" TO CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR (CMLA) GENERAL ZIA BEHIND THE TEHRIK. HE MUST ACT QUICKLY AND FORCEFULLY, HOWEVER, IF HE HOPES TO BEAT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) TO THE PUNCH. THE NDP, WHICH QUIT THE PNA OVER THE ALLIANCE'S DECISION TO JOIN THE GOVERNMENT (REFTEL B), ALSO HAS A PROGRESSIVE FOLLOWING AND COULD APPEAL TO PPP-ITES LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO ROOST.

6. MANY OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT SINCE THE TEHRIK LACKS A REAL ORGANIZATIONAL BASE (EXCEPT FOR CITY LAWYERS) ASGHAR NOW MUST OPENLY CONFRONT THE GOVERNMENT, HOPING THAT HIS APPEAL AS THE

PROTECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND AS THE HOPE OF THE PROGRESSIVE
FORCES WILL ATTRACT SUPPORT AND COUNTERACT HIS PARTY'S
ORGANIZATIONAL WEAKNESSES. THIS COURSE IS FRAUGHT WITH POTENTIAL
DANGERS, BUT FOR ASGHAR, FACED WITH A POLITICAL GOVERNMENT FILLED
WITH HIS FORMER ALLIES, AND A NEW CHALLENGE TO HIS FORMERLY
UNIQUE OPPOSITION ROLE, IT MAY BE THE ONLY WAY TO REMAIN A
POWERFUL FORCE IN THE POLITICAL GAME.
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